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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: DRUG ADDICTS HAVE NOWHERE TO TURN
FOR ASSISTANCE

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: Families in Turkmenistan affected by drug abuse struggle daily to help their family members deal with heroin addictions but receive little help from the government. Often, they are forced to choose between cutting off their spouses and children or treating the drug problem at home since there are no effective treatment centers/programs in Turkmenistan. And, despite government promises to implement a drug recidivism and demand reduction program, there are still no educational programs or other government-led efforts to help families. Exacerbating the problem are the police, who cannot be relied upon to enforce drug laws. END SUMMARY.

DRUG USE IS RAPMANT IN ALL REGIONS

13. (U) Families in Turkmenistan affected by drug abuse struggle daily to help their family members deal with heroin addictions with little help from the government. Recent accounts suggest that at least one person in almost every extended family suffers from drug addiction. This high usage figure is exacerbated by the relatively cheap narcotics and easy access to heroin in all parts of Turkmenistan. Exact statistics are not available, but one contact suggested that, in a family with five or six children, there is usually at least one drug addict.

FAMILIES ARE FORCED TO FEED DRUG HABITS

14. (SBU) In general, Turkmen claim that it is more likely to be the husband than the wife who is addicted. (COMMENT: This could be indicative of even heavier societal stigma against female drug addicts, a category generally believed to be limited to prostitutes. END COMMENT.) Families with addicts seem to have few choices. There are common reports of husbands selling everything in the household in order to gain additional money for another dose, and they sell these items for very low prices. While the wife and children can leave the addict-husband through divorce or separation, the wife then returns to her family's home, which might also have an addict.

15. (SBU) In these instances, the spouse will often cover up the addict's problem from those outside the family, to the point that they will take extra jobs or sell family possessions to feed the drug habit. In Turkmen culture, it is unseemly to air a family's dirty laundry in public. This can lead to the addiction problem being concealed until it is out of control and the family runs out of alternate options. One observer commented that in cases she was familiar with, addicts were reported to the police or committed to a hospital "only when the family was fed up and had no other options."

16. (U) If the addict is a child, the parents will often try to conceal the drug addiction due to a mixture of shame and love for the child and, in some instances, will enable the addiction to prevent the child from becoming homeless or resorting to other means to get drugs. Even in cases in which the parents force the child to leave the house, the child often returns, and the parents, due to Turkmen culture's strong sense of family obligations, will often take the child back into the home.

REAL TREATMENT CENTERS DO NOT EXIST

17. (SBU) There are several treatment hospitals in Turkmenistan. However, committing family members to a rehabilitation facility seems to be the method of last resort. These hospitals all have poor reputations, with recidivism rates reaching close to 100%. In fact, one person stated that Turkmen facilities are so bad that her

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ex-husband's family sent her husband to Russia to get effective treatment after they exhausted all internal resources.

POLICE DETENTIONS ARE A JOKE FOR DRUG ADDICTS

18. (SBU) Families do not report drug addiction to the authorities unless they have no other choice and have completely run out of funds. If the police receive a report about a drug addict, they will detain the addict briefly, but there is little likelihood that the individual will remain in prison. Even if a family or neighborhood reports an addict to the police, it rarely helps. One addict reportedly has been detained multiple times and is a known drug user. Nevertheless, he usually is released within 24 to 48 hours of his detention and returns home. Those detained for longer than a few days are often released during the next general national amnesty. Some say the majority of those released by presidential pardon are in prison due to drug-related offenses. Under such circumstances, there is little incentive for frustrated neighbors or families to turn to the legal system when dealing with drug addicts.

MOTHERS LIVE IN FEAR OF DRUG-ADDLED NEIGHBORS

19. (SBU) Addicts returned to neighborhoods have a great impact on the community around them. Mothers are fearful for the future of their children and the impact that drugs will play. One mother, who lives next to a man known to be an addict, is afraid to let her children play in the neighborhood without supervision. She mentioned that she worries that drug dealers will offer her children free drugs to get them hooked -- apparently a common practice -- and that unsavory characters come to the neighborhood in search of her neighbor. These fears cross economic boundaries and neighborhoods.

CHILDREN ARE THE REAL VICTIMS

110. (SBU) Those most greatly affected by this entire process are the children growing up in homes with drug addicts or who witness drug use. A mother said that her son is ashamed to speak about his father, although he had no contact after the

father became addicted. While some children are more aware of the dangers of drug use due to growing up and living with addicts, schools have no educational programs that counsel against drugs. Instead, educational efforts are left up to parents and the few programs offered by international organizations and small public organizations.

¶11. (SBU) COMMENT: The years of denial about drug problems under former President Niyazov have left Turkmenistan poorly equipped to carry out President Berdimuhamedov's new war on drugs. While the government seems committed to fighting narcotics trafficking, it simply does not have the human capacity or resources to move forward on multiple fronts. This and sensitivities about discussing social problems in public make rehabilitation and drug-demand reduction programs the most difficult to implement, leaving addicts and their families the real losers. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND